

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY-NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Mato Paha (Sioux) Nowahawus (Cheyenne)

AND/OR COMMON

Bear Butte

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Sturgis

☒ VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2

STATE

South Dakota

CODE

46

COUNTY

Meade

CODE

093

**3 CLASSIFICATION****CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☐ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☒ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☒ PUBLIC☐ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☐ OCCUPIED☒ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☒ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME State of South Dakota (multiple ownership)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Department of Game, Fish and Parks

CITY, TOWN

Pierre

VICINITY OF

STATE

South Dakota

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Meade County Register of Deeds

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Sturgis

STATE

South Dakota

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

South Dakota Historic Sites Survey - National Register of Historic Places

DATE

1968 - 1973

☒ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

W. H. Over Dakota Museum, University of South Dakota

CITY, TOWN

Vermillion

STATE

South Dakota

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT  
☐ GOOD  
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☒ UNALTERED  
☐ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

#### Summary

Bear Butte stands near the outer edge of the northern Black Hills of South Dakota. It towers 1,200 feet above the surrounding plains, reaching a height of 4,442 feet. The butte was formed as a result of the deep structural movement which created the Black Hills. While the hills were being formed to the west, rising pressure and consequent high temperatures drove a mass of precambrian material toward the surface. A tough overburden and slacking off of underground pressure stopped this viscous fluid from breaking through, creating a blister of solid rock. Subsequent erosion has exposed only those metamorphasized sedimentary layers nearest the hot magma. Approached from the east, Bear Butte appears as a towering cone-shaped mountain covered with broken rock and little vegetation. The butte tapers off to the west forming a feature called Cactus Flats, the remains of a geologic dome formed by the rising magma's first attempt to reach the surface.

A manmade lake, farms, roads, South Dakota State Park visitor facilities, and number of scattered homes are modern intrusions to the historic scene of Bear Butte. Those intrusions are, however, scattered and today the environment is essentially rural. There are no developments on the butte itself.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

### PERIOD

### AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Native American Mythology
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 18th century to present BUILDER/ARCHITECT n/a

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Summary

Bear Butte derives its primary historical significance from its association with the religious and cultural beliefs of the Cheyenne Indians. Although the mountain is also historically associated with other Plains Indian tribes, especially the Sioux, and although it became a well known landmark to early explorers and frontiersmen, it is from the mountain's role in the Cheyenne myth of how the tribe received their beliefs, customs, and mores that Bear Butte draws its reputation. The Cheyenne call Bear Butte Nowahawus, "the place where the people were taught." The myth with which Nowahawus is associated is called "Sweet Medicine." According to the myth, it was to Nowahawus that Sweet Medicine, the most revered Cheyenne prophet, traveled to learn from the sacred persons, the agents of Maheo, the All Father, how the tribe should live and act. Because Nowahawus was the place where Sweet Medicine received his knowledge, which he then conveyed to the tribe, the Cheyenne regard the mountain as being sacred. It is a Cheyenne Mt. Sinai. As a Cheyenne holy place Bear Butte illustrates the significance of the natural environment not only to the forms of Indian material existence, but also to his religious forms and belief systems.

#### History

On October 16, 1978, Edward Red Hat, Arrow Keeper of the Cheyenne Indians, sent a letter to the President of the United States seeking the latter's help to preserve a mountain in South Dakota. "It is our plea at this time," Edward Red Hat wrote, "that you will, as a God fearing man, assist us in our efforts to save our Sacred Mountain, our homeland Nowahawus. Many prayers have been sent to Maheo (Almighty God) to direct us to the path of safe recovery of Nowahawus, our home, religion, culture, tradition and inherent right to the freedom of worship at our Religious Center, Nowahawus." 1

## 9

(see continuation sheet)

## 10

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

## UTM REFERENCES

Figure 1 shows two horizontal lines, B and D, with vertical tick marks. Line B has three tick marks, and line D has four tick marks. The labels 'ZONE', 'EASTING', and 'NORTHING' are placed between the lines. 'ZONE' is under the first tick mark of B. 'EASTING' is under the second and third tick marks of B. 'NORTHING' is under the first, second, and third tick marks of D.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

(see continuation sheet)

**LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES**

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11

NAME / TITLE

James W. Sheire, Historian

## ORGANIZATION

Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

May 1981

STREET &amp; NUMBER

440 G Street NW

TELEPHONE

(202)-234-6401

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

## 12

**THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:**

NATIONAL \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

**STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE**

**TITLE**

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**ATTEST:**

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Nowahawus (also spelled Nahwahaus and Noaha-vose) is the Cheyenne name for a mountain or butte near Sturgis, South Dakota on the edge of the Black Hills. The mountain is commonly called Bear Butte. Bear Butte in turn is the translation of the Sioux name for the mountain, Mato Paho. It is ironical that the Sioux gave the mountain its common name. Although Bear Butte may have had some religious significance for the Sioux, and although they often camped in its vicinity, its significance was immeasurably greater to the Cheyenne.

Literally translated Nowahawus means "the hill where the people were taught." As the hill where the people were taught, Bear Butte was sacred to the historic Cheyenne (and remains so to many traditional Cheyenne).

The Cheyenne often refer to the mountain as the Sacred Mountain. "Here life truly had begun for the Cheyenne," Father Peter J. Powell, a contemporary student of Cheyenne culture states, "for here inside the holy mountain, Maheo, the All Father Himself, first gave Sweet Medicine the four sacred arrows. After that the Cheyenne had become the People, the choosen called out ones from all other people, the one's who were Maheo's own people. To be far distant from the Sacred Mountain was to be cut off from the source of sacred life itself." 2

Edward Red Hat's plea to the President to preserve Nowahawus was nothing less than an appeal to preserve both a shrine of his people's traditional culture and a symbol of the historical continuity and endurance of the Cheyenne.

The Cheyenne are members of the Algonkian linguistic group that historically included, among other tribes, the Blackfeet, Arapaho, and Plains Ojibwa (Chippewa). In the late 17th century the Cheyenne lived in present day Minnesota. In Minnesota the fixed village characterized the tribe's settlement pattern. The cultivation of corn and wild rice was the main feature of their subsistence pattern. During the first half of the 18th century the Cheyenne, like other woodland tribes, were pushed westward. They first migrated to the upper Missouri, where they lived in close proximity to the Mandan and Hidasta villages. Although they adopted the earth lodge of these tribes, they continued to live in fixed villages, and cultivated crops. They also began to assume some of the cultural traits of the plains Indians. In addition they started to participate in the trading patterns that developed among the plains tribes and the tribes of the upper Missouri. At the end of the 18th century small pox decimated the tribes of the upper Missouri. This calamity, coupled with the attacks of the Dakota Sioux, forced the Cheyenne to move again. By this time they had acquired the horse and guns, which were widely distributed among plains Indians. These two factors allowed the Cheyenne to abandon entirely the fixed village and crop raising and to adopt the cultural traits of a plains Indian tribe. In approximately 1780 the tribe moved to an area west of the Black Hills and there between 1780 and the first quarter of the 19th century they completed their adaptation to the physical conditions of the plains. The buffalo became their main source of subsistence and they organized the tribe in nomadic bands.

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In approximately 1830 the Cheyenne, who at this time probably numbered around 3,000, split into two main branches known as the Southern Cheyenne and the Northern Cheyenne. The Southern Cheyenne were attracted to Bent's Fort. This fort, one of the first outposts of white civilization in Colorado, was built in 1832 by the firm of Bent, St. Vrain, and Company. This fur trading company had access to the trade goods of both St. Louis and Santa Fe. Moreover, its proprietor, William Bent, married a Cheyenne woman and the Southern Cheyenne could thus expect fair treatment and honest trade in exchanging buffalo robes and furs for the by then coveted blankets, tobacco, guns, and other trade goods.

The Northern Cheyenne, the smaller branch, settled farther north in the territory around the upper waters of the Platte River.

At the beginning of the plains Indian - Euroamerican contact period, the Cheyenne welcomed the traders and trappers who came among them bringing labor saving trade goods, exotic beads, iron pots, and steel utensils. However, under continued and relentless white encroachment on their lands, the Cheyenne, like all plains Indians, soon became embroiled in the plains Indian wars. The Southern Cheyenne suffered first. The tribe was rocked in 1864 at Sand Creek, Colorado in the now infamous Chivington Massacre. Hundreds of Cheyenne men, women, and children were literally slaughtered by a group of ragged "militia" organized in Denver. In 1868 at the so called Battle of the Washita George A. Custer of later Little Big Horn fame attacked a Cheyenne winter encampment inflicting further casualties. Their spirit broken, the Southern Cheyenne gave up further organized resistance and settled on a reservation in Oklahoma. The Northern Cheyenne held on to their historic way of life a decade longer. After participating in and celebrating the great Indian victory at the Little Big Horn in 1876, they, like their allies the Sioux and Crow, were soon "brought in". The Northern Cheyenne were shipped to Oklahoma to join their Southern brethren. The living conditions in Oklahoma soon deteriorated. On the verge of starvation, and remembering their treasured lands in the north, several bands of Northern Cheyenne broke off the Oklahoma reservation and, after an heroic trek, made their way back north. They were eventually settled on a reservation in southeastern Montana that is today their home. With buffalo gone, their traditional nomadic life ended, and their spirit broken, the Cheyenne entered the reservation period.

The Cheyenne, as well as other Native Americans, have often been called children of nature. The natural environment in which the Indian lived conditioned all forms of his existence. His subsistence types, settlement patterns, dwellings, utensils, tools, implements, hunting equipment, all demonstrated adaptation to the physical and material conditions of his world. Just as the Indian created forms for adapting his biophysical nature to the natural environment, so he also turned to nature for explanations that would explain and give meaning, order, and cause to his life.

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The Indian embodied or gave expression to his explanations of such human concerns as the origin of his kind, the laws of nature, and the nature of good and evil in myths, legends, and stories. Possessing no written language, Indian culture was oral. The myths, legends, stories, which constituted each tribe's collective knowledge and wisdom, were passed from generation to generation by means of re-telling. In Cheyenne culture one of the most important, if not the most important, myth dealt with the origin of the tribe's beliefs, traditions, mores, and customs. The content of this myth, simply called The Story of Sweet Medicine, was the Cheyenne explanation of how the tribe came to be as it was as a people and why they lived as they did. The Sweet Medicine myth brought cause, meaning, and order to Cheyenne existence. And it is in the context of this myth that Nowahawus derives its significance for the Cheyenne.

The Sweet Medicine myth has been recorded by various sources over the years since white ethnologists and other white men interested in Cheyenne life and customs first began writing down what George B. Grinnell, an early Cheyenne expert, called "Cheyenne Tales." Although there are variations in the myth among the different versions, the main outlines of the story as recorded by the anthropologist and ethnologist George A. Dorsey at the turn of the century, Grinnell in the 1920's, and more recently Peter J. Powell are similar. <sup>3</sup>

According to Powell the Cheyenne venerated no name more than that of Mutsiiuiv, the Prophet, or, as the name is commonly translated, Sweet Medicine. "Sweet Medicine's teaching is the spiritual milk," Powell states, "by which the Cheyenne have grown in medicine." <sup>4</sup> A long time ago a boy was born in the Cheyenne tribe. Orphaned at an early age he was raised by an old woman. He grew to be a strange and beautiful young man who enjoyed performing unusual and mystifying tricks. One day while still a young man, Sweet Medicine went out hunting. Luck was with him and he soon killed a two year old bull buffalo. The animal had an exceptionally fine coat of hair that would make an excellent robe. While Sweet Medicine was skinning the buffalo, an important chief rode up and, exercising a prerogative, demanded that Sweet Medicine give him the robe. When Sweet Medicine refused, the chief berated him. Angered Sweet Medicine picked up the bull's hind leg and struck the chief a mortal blow. Murder was an especially nefarious crime among the Cheyenne and the youth's act outraged military men responsible for law and order in the camp. The men of the various warrior societies set out to kill Sweet Medicine on sight. Sweet Medicine escaped, but from time to time he would appear near the camp. However, each time the warriors went after him, they were unable to catch him. He would run and hide and, just as it seemed his capture was certain, he would appear dressed in the outfit of one of the soldier societies, e.g. in the war bonnet of the Elk Society, and escape, or, he would transform himself into an animal or bird and simply run or fly away. This went on for a number of years.

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After many years had passed Sweet Medicine decided to sneak into the village to see his brother. However, the brother quickly betrayed him and he was captured. Placing Sweet Medicine in a pit, the tribe moved to another location. Soon bad days came to the Cheyenne that lasted four years. They decided that the cause of their misfortune lay in their treatment of Sweet Medicine. When they returned to the pit where they had left him, they found him well and healthy. Sweet Medicine went away, but returned after a brief time with ample supplies of buffalo to end the tribe's starvation. With the return of the buffalo the tribe recovered.

As a sign of gratitude, an important chief gave his daughter to Sweet Medicine as a future wife. Together the two set off on a journey to a great place that Sweet Medicine knew about from his wanderings during his period of banishment. They soon came upon a tall, cone shaped mountain on the edge of the plains. On the side of the mountain was a big, flat, thick rock that moved revealing a lodge within the hill. Sweet Medicine entered. In the lodge were all the things and beings that belong to the earth; persons, buffalo, antelope, birds, rocks, trees, and grass, in short, all things that exist. These were the Maiyun, the holy ones. All peoples of the earth were represented, white, brown, black, and red skinned people. The Chief Person asked Sweet Medicine to select the person he would like to resemble. When the young man choose an exceptionally handsome person, that person turned into a rock. The Chief Person said that Sweet Medicine's vanity had caused him to make a false selection. He had choosen looks instead of wisdom and knowledge. As a result Sweet Medicine would never enjoy eternal life and he would have to be instructed in the ways of the world and good and evil. The Chief Person told Sweet Medicine to follow another of the holy persons around the world and learn from him. The journey lasted four years. During this time Sweet Medicine was instructed in all the ways how man should live and conduct himself in order to achieve prosperity and happiness. When Sweet Medicine returned to the lodge within the mountains, the Chief Person proclaimed the educational period over. He presented Sweet Medicine with four arrows, two for use in war and two for use in the hunt. These sacred arrows, the Mahuts, were painted red and black and were feathered with eagle feathers. In addition to giving the Cheyenne dominance over other men and over the animals, they were the symbolic channel through which Maheo's supernatural life flowed to the Cheyenne.. Coming from Maheo, the All Father Himself, the arrows were the continuous means by which the Cheyenne were linked to Great Mystery.

Wrapping the Mahuts in a coyote skin Sweet Medicine and his bride-to-be set off for home. When they arrived at the camp, Sweet Medicine ordered that all the lodges be arranged in a circle and that his tipi be placed in the center. He then entered the camp and hung the sacred arrows over his doorway. Calling the people together, Sweet Medicine said that he had come to tell the people about his experiences and to educate them in what he had learned from the holy people who lived in the lodge within the mountain. Sweet Medicine remained with the Cheyenne through four lives.



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His aging pattern followed the seasons; a youth in spring, a young man in summer, middle age in the fall, and old age in the winter. During this time he instructed the Cheyenne in how they should live. His teachings ranged from the beliefs and rituals that would constitute their "religion", to how the tribe should be politically organized and structured (10 main groupings made up of 44 bands; the roles of chiefs and the warrior societies ) to the proper conduct of the warrior in time of battle, to the mores to follow in courting and marriage, to the requirements of daily life such as how to tan hides, to dress robes, to make pipes from the leg bone of an antelope, and how to grow plants for smoking. Sweet Medicine's teachings covered all aspects of Cheyenne life.

While in his fourth life Sweet Medicine gathered the people to tell them that he must soon leave them. At this time he made a prophesy. He said that the Cheyenne would be engaged in many wars with other peoples and there would be killing. He warned them that someday men with hair on their faces would come among them and assume dominance over the land and over the Cheyenne. The buffalo would disappear and the people would eat a spotted, hooved animal. He further foretold that the Cheyenne would stand in danger of disappearing as a people. To ward off this danger he admonished them to always remain faithful to all that he had taught them. In the summer, when he had reached full manhood, Sweet Medicine died.

After Sweet Medicine's death the sacred arrows were placed in the custody of one of the tribe's wisest men. He became the arrow keeper. Periodically he would call the tribe's male population, and especially the young men, together and tell them the story of Sweet Medicine. The telling, that lasted four days and that was accompanied by elaborate rituals, was the way in which Sweet Medicine's teachings and prophecies were passed on from generation to generation. The arrows were also central to another ceremony called the Arrow Renewal Ceremony. This ceremony, that was conducted during periods of hardship or when there had been a homicide in the tribe, was meant to call forth Maheo's blessings on the tribe and to renew the tribe's dedication to remain faithful to Sweet Medicine's teachings. This Arrow Renewal ceremony, as well as the Sacred Buffalo Hat ceremony and the Sun Dance, constituted the most important and solemn religious festivals in Cheyenne culture.

Sweet Medicine's sacred arrows remain with the Cheyenne to the present day (they are with the Southern Cheyenne). However, in 1837 a disaster occurred. Because two of the arrows, the war arrows, give special powers over enemies, the arrow bundle often accompanied war parties. In 1837 such a party set out against the Pawnee. The battle did not go well and the Pawnee captured the sacred arrow bundle. Because of the importance of the bundle, and clear danger that its loss could result in the Cheyenne being cut off from Maheo, the Cheyenne immediately opened negotiations. In time the Pawnee agreed to return two arrows, after the

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Cheyenne had paid a huge ransom of horses and other goods. The Cheyenne then held a renewal ceremony, possibly at Nowahawus. Two new arrows were made at this time and added to the bundle. The Cheyenne never fully recovered from the shock of loosing two of the sacred arrows and Cheyenne tradition holds that many of the misfortunes they later experienced were the direct result of this calamity. In 1937 an attempt was made to recover the arrows, but the Pawnee, who had developed their own tradition around the arrows - a great and much heralded Pawnee victory - refused to return them. To this day at least one of the sacred Cheyenne arrows is reported to be in Pawnee hands.

The significance of Nowahawus is twofold. First, according to Cheyenne tradition Bear Butte is the place where Sweet Medicine received the sacred arrows. As such the mountain was sacred to the historic Cheyenne. Under the impact and influence of the reservation system, with its accompanying programs aimed at the acculturation of the Indian, many Cheyenne abandoned the old ways and beliefs. Indeed, for a period at the beginning of this century, native American religious ceremonies such as the sun dance were forbidden. Other Cheyenne, however, remained faithful to the traditional belief system. These traditional Cheyenne maintained their reverence for Sweet Medicine and the belief that Nowahawus is sacred. After 1900 many sneaked off the reservation to visit Bear Butte to fast and pray. In 1921 four men went there to thank Maheo for the Allied victory in WW I and to seek his help for the tribe. In 1939 a Sturgis group, that was hoping to have Bear Butte declared a national monument that would benefit the local tourist industry, invited four older Cheyenne to come to Bear Butte and explain the mountain's significance. This interest lead to the movement that resulted in the establishment of the Bear Butte State Park. In 1945 a party of 21 Cheyenne visited Bear Butte. four of their number fasted and prayed for the traditional four day period.

More recently, and especially since the rise Indian interest in their ethnic identity and in their historic culture, more and more Cheyenne have returned to Bear Butte to fast and pray. Today the visitor often sees Cheyenne at prayer on the side of the mountain. Edward Red Hat called Bear Butte a religious center. Its significance to him rests in its importance as the Cheyenne Mt. Siani. He and his traditional Cheyenne fellow believers travel to the hill where the people were taught, "For power in abundance awaits the Cheyenne there." 5

In addition to being of religious significance to the traditional Cheyenne, Bear Butte is significant as an artifact that illustrates and commemorates the importance of Nature in Indian culture. For the plains Indian, be he a Blackfoot, Sioux, Cheyenne, or Pawnee, nature was an all pervading presence. The phenomena of the natural environment - the land with its mountains, plains, valleys, streams, animals, trees, rocks, and the sky with its clouds, storms, winds, rains, snow, sun, and stars - dominated his experience of the world. He knew no man

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made environment. The Indian social, political, cultural, and economic forms bear witness to the influence of the natural environment within which, as many Indian legends of their creation have it, he woke up.

The belief systems of all Indian tribes, one of the most important features of their cultures, were based on an interpretation of natural phenomena. Natural things such as animals, birds, rocks, and the wind were often viewed as being the physical projections or manifestations of specific spirits (and there was a regular pantheon of them; the Cheyenne called them the Mayiun). The sun, the giver of warmth and life, was venerated by numerous plain Indian tribes as witnessed in the important Sun Dance ceremony, a celebration of the sun as a source of life. The Cheyenne, however, were unusual in ascribing such central importance in their belief system to a topographical feature such as a mountain. Other tribes venerated sacred lakes and incorporated specific locations, mountains, or rivers into their myths, legends, and stories. But, at least among the plains Indians, the Cheyenne was the only tribe that believed a particular mountain was the place where the people were taught. The mythology of no other plains Indian tribe contains such a Mt. Saini myth. By incorporating a mountain in the creation of a myth central to their belief system, the Cheyenne documented the importance that the Indian attached to the natural environment not only as the source of his material well being, but also as the well spring for the content of his deepest and most profound creations; the explanation of his history and how he came to be. Bear Butte's significance is as an artifact that illustrates and commemorates the importance of Nature in the culture of the earliest Americans.

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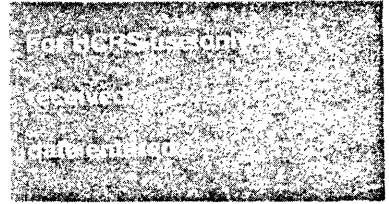
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Footnotes

1. Edward Red Hat to President Jimmy Carter, October 16, 1978.  
"Bear Butte File," National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, D.C..
2. Peter J. Powell, "They Drew from Power: An Introduction to Northern Cheyenne Ledger Book Art." in Peter J. Powell and Michael P. Malone, Montana Past and Present, (William A. Clark Memorial Library, 1976) p. 18.
3. See George B. Grinnell, By Indian Campfires, (New Haven, 1926); George A. Dorsey, "The Cheyenne," Field Museum, 9, publication 99, The Anthropological Series, (Chicago, 1905); and Peter J. Powell, Sweet Medicine, 2 vols., (Norman, 1969). This treatment is based primarily on Grinnell and Powell.
4. Powell, Sweet Medicine, 2, p. 460.
5. Ibid., p. 428.

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Bibliography

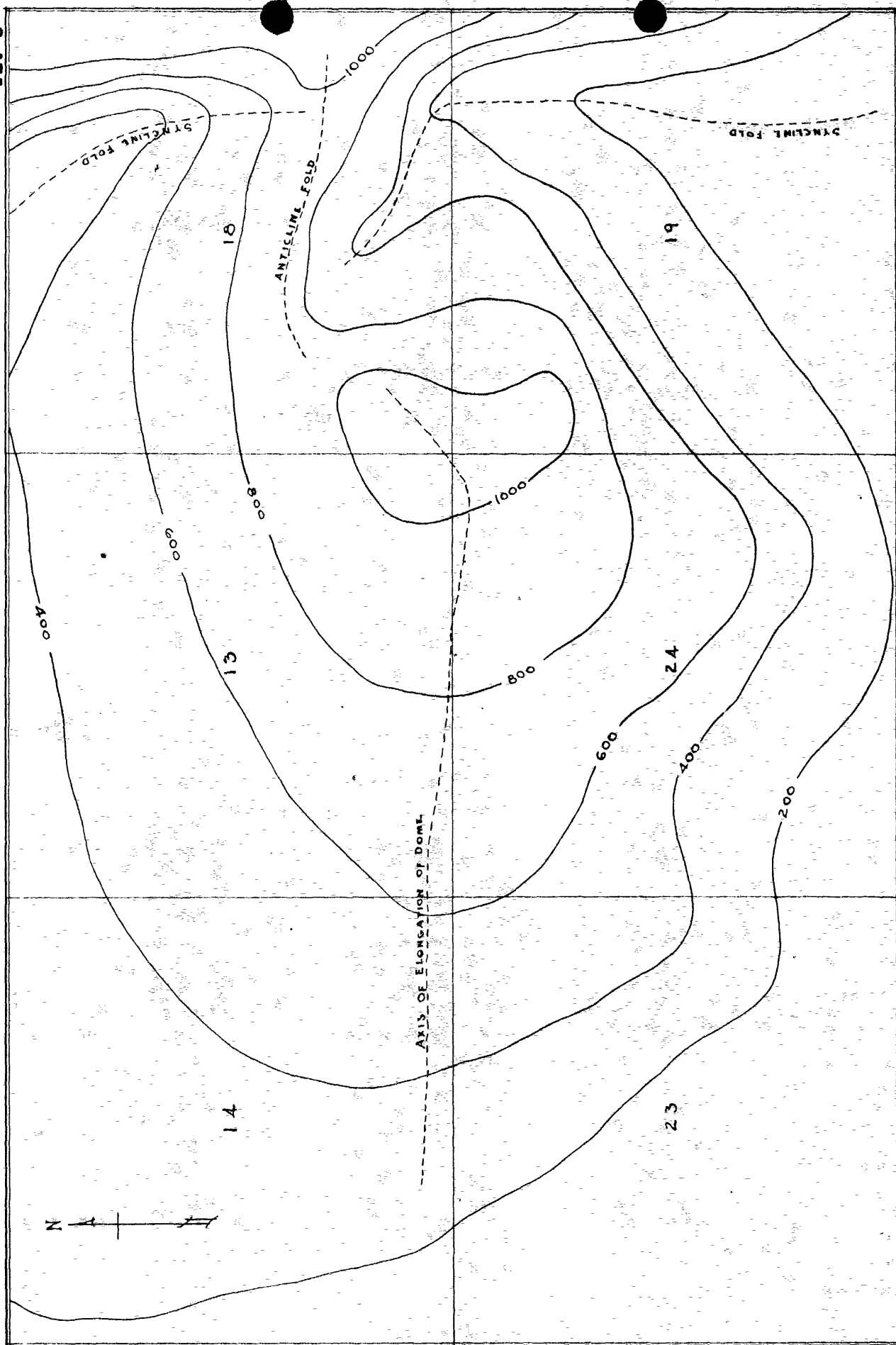
Dorsey, George A., "The Cheyenne," Field Museum, 9, no. 1, Publication 99, The Anthropological Series, (Chicago, 1905).

Grinnell, George B., By Indian Campfires, (New Haven, 1926).

-----, The Fighting Cheyennes, (Norman, 1956), 2ed.

Powell, Peter J. and Michael P. Malone, Montana Past and Present, (William A. Clark Memorial Library, 1976).

-----, Sweet Medicine, 2 vols., (Norman, 1969).



STRUCTURE MAP OF  
BEAR BUTTE DOME  
BY S.M. ANDERSON

Bench

Scale one inch to one mile

R. 5 E.

R. 6 E.

Pl. 1

B.M.

3310

Creek

Bear Butte

4424

Bear Butte  
Lake

T. 6 N.

T. 5 N.

B.M.

3486

STERGIS

Fort Meade

Cottle

Alkali

FORT MEADE MILITARY RESERVATION

Rocky Mts.

B.M. 3624